

GameIN: Proposing Methodological Disruptions in the Study of Inclusive Games

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Abstract

The paradigms for approaching disability have gradually evolved through four stages characterized by an exclusion - segregation - integration - inclusion path (Silva, 2009). The previously prevailing medical model of disability, which emphasizes the individuals' impairments as causing the disability, has been progressively replaced by a social model of disability, where it is seen as emerging from the environment's inability to accommodate the individual's support needs (Gilbert, 2019). The distinctive characteristics of games need to be considered in light of the new approach to disability. These characteristics include a wide range of potentialities such as interactivity, goal orientation, motivation through failure, or immediate feedback (Boyle et al., 2016). Considering this, games are nowadays seen as having a relevant potential to foster empowerment and inclusion with different underrepresented populations, even if some knowledge gaps and policy opportunities can still be identified (Stewart et al., 2013). Even though this potential is recognized, a significant gap seems to emerge. This is centered around the lack of representation of people with disability in gaming worlds, with research tending to see this subject through a utilitarian and categorical picture (Wästerfors & Hansson, 2017). As above explored, this includes the underrepresentation of these individuals' voices and desires (Sousa, 2020) in the use of research methodologies that contradict the premise of "nothing about us, without us" that originated the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) and most activist movements in the field (Johnson et al., 2019).

This paper aims to present a methodological disruption in the field of Participatory Communication Research (PCR) that led to the creation of the GameIN action-research project. The proposed methodological approach discussed here is based on the approach of two fundamental lines to the study of games in communication research: emancipatory and participatory research.

Emancipatory research is related to "the adoption of the social model of disability as the ontological and epistemological basis for research production", while empowering people with Intellectual Disability (pwID) in their self-emancipation processes (Watson, 2020, p. 130). In line

with these premises, participatory research emerged as closely linked to cognitive disabilities – such as intellectual disability – in order to challenge the passive role of the subjects in research and include them in its production. Other ways of naming this paradigm include inclusive research or co-production (Stranadová & Walmsley, 2018).

As a research approach, GameIN aims to explore the value of games to empower pwID and other related stakeholders (e. g. caregivers, advocacy associations, NGOs) in the promotion of inclusive and meaningful occupational activities, while contributing to more equalitarian media creation processes. This paper will present in detail the operationalization of the previously discussed pillars in the GameIN project, critically analyzing their potential impacts, which include contextual data on game-based, participatory and collaborative media creation processes as strategies to foster inclusion, empowerment, and equity. With this approach, we intend to foster discussion about the participation of underrepresented populations in media production, changing not only daily practices but, more systematically, the epistemological paradigms that underlie scientific research.

Key Words

games; inclusion; participation; participatory research; emancipatory research; media creation; empowerment.